We claim:

1.   A method for characterizing the risk of future cancer mortality for an individual, comprising the steps of:

(a)   obtaining the level of the patient's serum total bilirubin;

(b)   comparing the obtained level to a predetermined level for serum total bilirubin; and,

(c)   characterizing from the comparison the risk of future cancer mortality for the individual.

2.   The method for characterizing the risk of future cancer mortality for an individual according to claim 1, wherein the predetermined level of serum total bilirubin is 0.66 mg/dl, and wherein levels near or below 0.66 mg/dl indicate that the individual has a higher than normal risk of future cancer mortality.

3.   A method for characterizing the risk of rheumatoid arthritis for an individual, comprising the steps of:

(a)   obtaining the level of the individual's serum total bilirubin;

(b)   comparing the obtained level to a threshold level for serum total bilirubin; and,

(c)   characterizing from the comparison the risk of rheumatoid arthritis for the individual.

4.   A method for characterizing the reduced probability of future cardiovascular disease, future cardiovascular

mortality, future cancer mortality and future all-cause mortality for an individual, comprising the steps of:

(a) obtaining the level of the individual's serum total bilirubin;

(b) comparing the obtained level to a predetermined level for serum total bilirubin; and,

(c) characterizing from the comparison a reduced probability for future cardiovascular disease, future cardiovascular mortality, future cancer mortality and future all-cause mortality for the individual.